

Under the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law (Global IHL Initiative), **Australia, Austria, Kenya, the United Arab Emirates and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** are pleased to present the:

WORKSTREAM 1

THIRD STATE CONSULTATION ON PREVENTION GOOD PRACTICES

For experts from armed forces, relevant ministries in capitals and legal and humanitarian advisers at Permanent Missions in Geneva

TUESDAY, 10 FEBRUARY 2026

10:00–12:30 (UTC+1)

FORMAT: IN PERSON (GENEVA) AND ONLINE (ZOOM)

Background

In every war, lives are lost, families separated, and livelihoods destroyed. Some of the most damaging consequences of war can, however, be averted or mitigated if international humanitarian law (IHL) is respected. Primary responsibility for establishing the laws, institutions and systems to limit the suffering caused by armed conflict rests with states. They negotiate legal instruments that protect certain categories of people and objects, or that regulate the use of specific weapons, and agree to be legally bound by these instruments by ratifying or acceding to them. States also incorporate IHL rules into domestic laws, policies and practices, and ensure that their armed forces know the law, are trained in it and are subject to a strong disciplinary system. They establish and maintain robust disciplinary and judicial systems to prosecute those who commit serious violations of the law. Through bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation, states can ensure that their allies and partners fulfil their IHL obligations. For decades, states and other actors have worked to develop and strengthen these systems to uphold IHL obligations. Despite their existence, violations of IHL continue to take place – with a frequency and a severity, and on a scale, that is unacceptable. This workstream seeks to build on global experience in preventing such violations and to explore new approaches. Its aim, ultimately, is to identify good practices, successful strategies and effective methodologies, and thus provide evidence-based guidance for cultivating an environment conducive to respecting IHL.

In the previous consultations on prevention good practices, states underlined that effective prevention begins with training and education that ensure all those who may take part in, or influence the course of, armed conflicts understand IHL and can apply it in practice. They emphasized that such training must go beyond technical instruction to cultivate a professional ethic grounded in humanitarian values, i.e. that integrates IHL into codes of conduct, leadership development and decision-making processes. Several participants noted that respect for IHL is most likely to endure when it forms part of the ethical

and institutional identity of armed and security forces. States also highlighted the importance of socializing IHL norms across society, through education, public communication and partnerships with academic, media and civil-society actors, so that restraint in war is recognized as a shared social and moral expectation rather than solely a military or legal requirement. Taken together, these views point to a holistic vision of training – one that sees knowledge, professional ethics and societal values as mutually reinforcing respect for IHL.

Building on these discussions, this consultation will examine how states can further strengthen prevention measures by combining existing practice on IHL training with insights from research on learning, behaviour and socialization. By connecting this wealth of practice to research on how people learn, internalize and act on norms, the consultation seeks to identify approaches that not only convey knowledge of the law but also shape the habits, motivations and collective expectations that sustain respect for IHL over time.

The practice of states, the experience of the ICRC and other organizations, and research across the fields of education, behavioural science and social psychology all show that knowledge alone rarely leads to behavioural change at the individual or societal level, whether in military or civilian contexts. People internalize and act on norms when they have opportunities to apply them in practice, observe them being modelled by respected leaders and peers, and experience them as socially expected and institutionally rewarded. In this sense, effective prevention requires more than disseminating information – it involves creating environments where lawful and humane conduct becomes the natural and socially expected choice.

Learning therefore progresses from formal instruction, which builds awareness and understanding, via reinforcement, where daily practice, mentoring and collective feedback strengthen desired behaviours, to socialization, where the principles that underpin IHL are absorbed into institutional culture and shared civic identity. When restraint and respect for human dignity are seen not only as legal duties but as markers of professionalism, integrity and national values, compliance becomes embedded in the whole fabric of the state and society.

Objectives

This consultation aims to:

- exchange experiences on strengthening respect for IHL through training, leadership and cultural reinforcement across sectors
- identify which audiences and institutions are most influential in shaping compliance behaviour, and how states can engage with them
- explore how formal instruction, experiential learning and socialization processes can work together to change conduct
- generate practical recommendations on prevention.

Next steps

Following the three rounds of consultations, the co-chairing states and the ICRC will formulate concrete recommendations, which will be presented to all states for further discussion:

- On **1 April 2026**, the first versions of the recommendations for all workstreams will be sent to all Permanent Missions in Geneva and published on the [Humanity in War](#) website.

- The **fourth round of consultations** will be held between **4 and 6 May 2026**, in a **hybrid format**. During this round, all states will be invited to share comments on the first versions of the recommendations for each workstream, which will be discussed sequentially.
- On **1 June 2026**, the second versions of the recommendations for all workstreams will be sent to all states and published on the [Humanity in War](#) website.
- The **fifth round of consultations** will be held between **22 and 26 June 2026**, in a **hybrid format**. All states will be invited to provide final comments on the recommendations. Following this round, the co-chairing States and the ICRC will finalize the recommendations for each workstream, which will be presented to all states in the second part of 2026.

Participants

- The consultation will be held in a hybrid format with participation in person and online.
- The consultation is **open to all states that are interested**. There is a strong preference for military experts, capital-based government representatives specializing in IHL and representatives from Permanent Missions in Geneva. States are encouraged to involve relevant ministries and armed forces in the preparation of this consultation. In addition, states might consider coordinating the preparation through their National IHL Committee, where one exists, though the consultation is not (solely) about the activities undertaken by the committee.
- Other representatives with specific expertise in the subject matter (e.g. members of international organizations, civil society and academia) will also participate upon invitation.
- Please register no later than **Wednesday, 4 February 2026**, using the [registration form](#).

Procedure

- The working languages will be **Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish**, with simultaneous interpretation.
- We ask participants to limit their statements to **four minutes** to ensure sufficient time for all participants to take the floor. At the end of the consultation, and after all participants that wish to contribute have done so, states and other participants will be given an opportunity to discuss ideas proposed by others.
- When preparing their statements, participants are requested to kindly consider the **guiding questions** provided in the agenda below.
- The **inclusive, constructive, non-politicized and solution-oriented** nature of the discussions will be maintained throughout the consultation. While participants are encouraged to refer to their state's domestic practice during the consultations, they are asked to kindly refrain from discussing specific contexts or the practice of other states.
- To facilitate interpretation, we invite participants to share a copy of their statements by **30 January 2026**, via email at ihlinitiative@icrc.org, with "Prevention good practices third consultation" in the subject line. We also encourage participants to send their full written statements by email after the meeting. **Unless confidentiality is explicitly requested, these statements will be published on the [Humanity in War](#) website.**
- The consultation will be recorded, but the recording will not be made public.

Agenda

Prevention Good Practices Third Round of Consultations

10:00–12:30, 10 February 2025
ICRC Humanitarium, 17 avenue de la Paix, 1202 Geneva

**Depending on the number of statements given, all times set out below are subject to change.*

Registration and coffee / Login and connection	9:30–10:00
Opening of the meeting and introduction	10:00–10:30
Discussion States are invited to share views on what is required to go beyond formal IHL training and dissemination so that IHL compliance and its core values are embedded in the reflexes and identity of armed forces, other government institutions and the identity of the state/community more generally.	10:30–12:20
Guiding questions <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What would be required to ensure that IHL becomes embedded in the reflexes, habits and decision-making processes of a state's armed forces, from initial training through to operational practice?2. What leadership behaviours, institutional structures and societal influences are needed so that respect for IHL is the natural and professionally expected response across all levels of government and the armed forces?3. What would be required for respect for IHL to become an element of national and institutional identity that would withstand an actual or potential conflict?4. Does your state measure behavioural change in any area (IHL compliance or other), and if so, how? Could the same methods be used to measure behavioural change in relation to IHL?	
Concluding remarks	12:20–12:30